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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3124  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9869  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3218  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0323  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2295  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6810  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4674  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001361

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FORTY-EIGHT THOUSAND DISPLACED IN  
JAFFNA AS NGOS GEAR UP FOR HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS

REF: COLOMBO 1352 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: James R. Moore, Charge' d'Affaires, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the northern Jaffna district rose to approximately 48,000 by August 20, according to UNHCR. Military engagement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which began August 11, has varied between intense and routine for the past 10 days (reftels). The owner of one pro-LTTE newspaper was shot dead August 21, and the warehouse of another newspaper burnt down in Jaffna on August 18. As food, gasoline, and cash money supplies dwindle, the commercial runway at the Palaly Air Force Base and the A9 highway linking the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the island remain closed. An ICRC ship bearing humanitarian supplies departed Colombo for Jaffna August 21. Another ship is scheduled to arrive later in the week to extract several hundred expatriates, dual nationals, and Sri Lankan citizens who have requested evacuation from Jaffna since the recent escalation. Meanwhile, other expatriate NGO and humanitarian mine action staff plan to mobilize their fleets to deliver food and supplies to civilians. End Summary.

Displaced and Hungry  
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¶2. (C) Military engagement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which began on the Jaffna Peninsula on August 11, continued along the Forward Defense Line (FDL) August 18-21 as the LTTE launched an unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate government-held territory at Kilali, east of the Jaffna lagoon. Government spokesperson Keheliya Rambukwella confirmed to the press that the Sri Lanka Air Force bombed an LTTE Sea Tiger base on the Pooneryn Peninsula near Jaffna on August 20. According to UNHCR, the latest violence has displaced 48,000 civilians, approximately eight percent of the population of Jaffna district. Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K. Ganesh told the government-owned Daily News August 21 that approximately 5,000 families are currently being sheltered in NGO-funded welfare centers. News reports August

20-21 indicated that food, kerosene and cash money supplies are critical.

13. (C) A cargo ship bearing an ICRC flag will depart Colombo on the evening of August 21, according to ICRC Deputy Peter Krakolinig, carrying food and other humanitarian aid. Krakolinig advised that the ship is not suitable for evacuation of the several hundred civilians, dual nationals and expatriates who have registered with the GA to take part in an ICRC evacuation, but that a second ship will be sent later in the week. 175 expatriates have registered with diplomatic missions to participate in an ICRC or military evacuation. HALO Trust Program Manager Stephen Pritchard told poloff on August 21 that he and his local staff, which includes 300 humanitarian deminers, would mobilize to use HALO vehicles to distribute several thousand tons of World Food Program (WFP) food supplies around the Jaffna Peninsula at the request of the GA and the UNHCR.

#### Evacuations

14. (C) ICRC Deputy Head of Delegation told Australian poloff August 21 that a road evacuation from LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi would depart at noon that day. He added that Head of Delegation Toon van de Hove would meet with Human Rights and Disaster Relief Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe August 21 to finalize which ship would be used in the evacuation from the Jaffna peninsula.

15. (C) Meanwhile, expatriate humanitarian mine action personnel (some U.S.-funded) and NGO workers feel that the

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Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is pressuring them to stay despite an earlier offer to assist in evacuation (ref A). On August 19, the SLA told three U.S.-funded humanitarian mine action personnel, including one RONCO and two HALO Trust employees, to be on standby to evacuate by military helicopter sometime during the weekend. On August 20, a military-civilian liaison, Col. Perera, called a meeting with expatriate NGO and humanitarian mine action personnel. In an August 20 email forwarded to us by the Dutch embassy, a Dutch NGO worker quoted Col. Perera as saying: "Of course you are free to go, but the road remains closed, the airport is only for military use, and there is no information about boats. We want you to be discrete, so as not to disturb the society. It would not be good if the population sees you packing."

16. (C) HALO Trust Mechanical Officer, Blerim Tufa, who attended the meeting, told poloff August 20: "They asked us what our problem was and why we wanted to leave. The Army wants to keep the NGOs in Jaffna to calm people down. They're not going to make it easy for us to get out." DATT will attend a meeting with Army Operations in the late afternoon of August 21 for an update on the military's plans to evacuate NGO and demining personnel. According to HALO's Pritchard, Col. Perera requested HALO to let the army use its heavy equipment. Similarly, Jaffna Security Forces Commander General Chandrasiri asked SLA Mine Action Coordinator Brigadier Chrishantha de Silva why SLA/RONCO heavy equipment was not being made available for the SLA to fortify the Forward Defense Line (FDL) in Jaffna, according to an August 21 conversation with RONCO director Fredrik Palsson.

#### Pro-LTTE Figures Targeted

17. (C) According to press reports and an eye-witness account from RONCO Technical Advisor Craig Crosby, on the evening of August 18 seven men set fire to the Jaffna warehouse of Uthayan newspaper, an LTTE-sympathetic daily with the highest circulation in the Jaffna peninsula. On the morning of August 21, a local BBC stringer told pol FSN, unidentified gunmen shot and killed Mr. S. Sivamaharajah in Jaffna, a former Member of Parliament for the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance. He was also the owner of "Namathu Eelanadu," the

second largest-circulation paper in Jaffna.

Comment

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18. (C) Comment: The displacement of a significant percentage of the population makes food and humanitarian aid crucial and our message of an immediate cessation of hostilities more critical. We hope the GSL will heed ours and other missions' requests for assistance evacuating staff and not use the presence of internationals to bolster its agenda. We will continue to press the GSL for assistance in evacuating demining staff from Jaffna. End comment.  
MOORE